
A Letter from the Regional Administrator



For the past four-and-a-half years, I have had the privilege of experiencing the incredible diversity of this region—from the Puerto Rico rainforest to the urban metropolis of Manhattan, from awe-inspiring Niagara Falls to the coral reefs of the U.S. Virgin Islands to the beautiful beaches of my home state of New Jersey.

Wherever I travel, people always ask me about the state of the environment. It is not surprising that they are concerned: virtually everyone today understands that there is a connection between his or her health and a healthy environment. They

know a lot about local problems—the need for more water or a dump site across the road. But more often than not, people need more information to help them more precisely gauge the overall quality of the air, land and water. When people see suburban highways choked with traffic, or “No Swimming” signs at their local beach, they often jump to the conclusion that the environment is getting worse. So, we have decided to set the environmental record straight.

This first Region 2 *State of the Environment Report* shows how far we have come and how far we still have to go. It is hard to believe that not very long ago, there was no EPA, no single federal agency mandated to protect human health and the environment. Harder to believe, there was no Clean Air Act, no Clean Water Act, no Superfund law to protect what we have come to see as basic rights to good health and a clean, healthy environment.

Since EPA’s creation in 1970, the country has made dramatic, measurable progress restoring and protecting the environment. And we’ve had our own success stories here in Region 2. The air is cleaner, our waters are less polluted, we are producing less waste—all accomplished while the regional and national economies have grown significantly.

At the same time, we are still confronted by daunting challenges. This report presents a blueprint of the new and often innovative ways we are tackling these challenges. It details EPA’s recent efforts to reinvent ourselves and our system of environmental protection. It highlights Region 2’s new initiatives in children’s health, environmental justice and community-based environmental protection. In addition, the report describes the unprecedented working partnerships we have created with the private sector, community groups, environmental organizations, and state and tribal governments.

The goal of the *State of the Environment Report* is not only to inform, but to inspire. With its words, charts and graphs, it provides a snapshot of how people, working together, have improved the world in which they live. It resonates with promise for the future. Speaking for the employees of Region 2, I hope you will join us as we work to shape the environment of that future.

Jeanne M. Fox
Regional Administrator
EPA Region 2

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Introduction

EPA Region 2—the Region of Diversity—an extraordinary mix of ecosystems, climates, cultures and people.

Region 2 is a study in contrasts. It is home to the concrete canyons of New York City and the barrios of Puerto Rico; the wilderness of the Adirondack forests and the pine barrens of New Jersey; the turquoise waters of the Caribbean and the gray-blue Atlantic; the rolling farmland of upstate New York and the tropical farms of Puerto Rico; densely populated cities, vast suburban tracts, mighty rivers and hundreds of miles of beaches. Its native people pre-date the exploration of America. Historically, it has provided refuge to millions of immigrants from every corner of the globe; today, in a single elementary school in Queens, New York, more than 40 languages are spoken by the students.

Even the forms of government within the Region vary. EPA Region 2 is responsible for environmental protection in two states, New Jersey and New York; a commonwealth, Puerto Rico; a territory, the U.S. Virgin Islands; and seven federally-recognized Indian Nations—Cayuga Nation, Oneida Indian Nation, Onondaga Nation, St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, Seneca Nation of Indians, Tonawanda Band of Senecas, and Tuscarora Nation.

The Region's approximately 30 million residents are concentrated in its urban areas. Close to 85 percent live in New York and New Jersey, mainly in the New York- New Jersey metropolitan area. Approximately one-third of the more than three and one-half million residents of Puerto Rico live in and around San Juan.

Although environmental conditions have improved substantially over the past 25 years, population growth and increased economic activity, especially in the urban areas, have placed pressures on the Region's natural resources. More cars are on the road, more energy is being used, more waste generated and more land developed. The Region also bears the burden of economic activity in other parts of the country. Vehicle emissions along the eastern seaboard as far south as Washington, D.C. add to ozone pollution in the Northeast's urban areas, and air pollutants from Midwestern power plants contribute to acid rain, which impacts the Region's lakes, rivers and forests.

The State of the Environment Report details the many programs and special initiatives EPA has developed to protect human health and the environment. It highlights regional priorities including, the reinvention of our regulatory system; a focus on children's health; the revitalization of urban areas; the incorporation of environmental justice into environmental protection; the expansion of community-based environmental protection; and the enhancement of public access to environmental information.

The report is an important piece of the Region's commitment to keep the public informed and fully involved in the environmental decision-making process. The trends and data detailed here provide an understanding of current environmental conditions. They also offer a baseline against which future environmental progress can be measured. In addition, the report offers practical information on how to deal with common environmental concerns and where to go for additional information.

Central to the Region's efforts to protect the environment are successful partnerships with the state, commonwealth and territory governments, the Region's Indian Nations, other federal agencies, and the many concerned individuals, organizations and communities throughout the Region. The Region looks to its partners in government and the public for information and ideas that will help us restore and better protect our common environment. After all, we are talking about our homes, our communities, and most importantly, our health and the health of our families.

Our environmental concerns are as diverse as our Region. A hurricane in one area, an ice storm in another; peregrine falcons nesting on skyscraper ledges and whales calving in a threatened bay; radon in suburban basements and lead in urban apartments; factory discharges and pesticide drift—diverse problems that require diverse responses. They also require us to put aside our differences and work together to find creative solutions.

Region 2 encourages people to participate in the protection of our incredible natural resources and the dynamic populations they support. This *State of the Environment Report* will give you a start.